

Race, rurality and representation: Black and minority ethnic mothers' experiences of their children's education in rural primary schools in England, UK

Bhopal, Kalwant

DOI:

[10.1080/09540253.2014.935301](https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2014.935301)

License:

Other (please specify with Rights Statement)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Bhopal, K 2014, 'Race, rurality and representation: Black and minority ethnic mothers' experiences of their children's education in rural primary schools in England, UK', *Gender and Education*, vol. 26, no. 5, pp. 490-504. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2014.935301>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

Publisher Rights Statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Gender and Education* on 15/7/2014, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/09540253.2014.935301>.

General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

Paper for Special Issue, Gender and Rurality in Education

Race, rurality and representation: Black and minority ethnic mothers' experiences of their children's education in rural primary schools in England, UK

Race, rurality and representation: Black and minority ethnic mothers' experiences of their children's education in rural primary schools in England, UK

Abstract

There is little research that has examined the role of mothers in their children's education in the rural space of the school, particularly in relation to the experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) families who are newcomers to the rural space. This article attempts to redress the balance and examine how BME mothers are positioned in rural primary schools in England (UK) which are predominantly White. The article is based on twenty in-depth interviews conducted with mothers who identified themselves as Black or from a minority ethnic background (India, Pakistan or Bangladesh). All of the respondents had moved into the areas in the last ten years. The findings from this research suggest that mothers are active agents in the education of their children; however their experiences reveal that within the White space of the school they are positioned as 'other' and 'outsiders' as they navigate the diasporic space of the White countryside.

Introduction

Research on rurality has focussed on an understanding of identities and school experiences in countries such as South Africa (Dunne, 2008; Molestane, 2012); Australia (Bryant and Pini, 2011), France (Reed-Danahay, 1996), England (Bhopal and Myers, 2011), China (Qinag *et al*, 2008) and the USA (Villenas, 2001). The rural has been considered from different disciplines and perspectives such as Sociology (Garland and Charakborti, 2006; Neal, 2002), Education (Balfour, 2012; Bhopal and Myers, 2011), Women's Studies (Panelli and Little, 2003), Anthropology (Geller and Stocket, 2006) and Geography (Holloway *et al*, 2010). There is also a body of literature which has explored how identities are understood in rural populations (Neal, 2002; 2009), particularly in relation to the position of BME groups as 'outsiders' (Chakraborti and Garland, 2004) and the repositioning of the rural as a multicultural and multi-ethnic space (Askins, 2009). Research has also emphasised the neglect of the rural in policy making (Bell and Jayne, 2010) and its relevance to broader academic concerns (Woods, 2009). In England (UK) images of rural locations are based on idyllic green open spaces associated with cleanliness, purity and an attachment to community. Such images are viewed in contrast to the city which is aggressive, selfish and unwelcoming (Bhopal and Myers, 2011). Far from being idyllic, the countryside is hostile to 'outsiders' and there is little sense of community, belonging and feelings of inclusion (Bhopal and Myers, 2011). The countryside has also been identified as having high rates of poverty, illiteracy and crime (Burnett, 2011; South West Rural Racism Project, 2009). Research also suggests that an increase in the numbers of city dwellers purchasing property in the countryside is at the expense of excluding 'locals' out of the housing market (The Independent, 2007 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/downside-of-rural-life-poverty-racism-and-mental-illness-440920.html>). The literature on rurality has explored discourses of diversity and multiplicity and how these intersect with race, class and gender in a predominantly White space. The focus has been on questioning how those positioned as 'others' are influenced by processes of inclusion, marginalisation and belonging. This article will explore the myth that the rural is an idyllic space with little or no conflict. It will attempt to disrupt the idyllic picture of the countryside to explore the role that gender, class and race play in the positioning of Black and minority ethnic mothers (BME) as 'outsiders' in the White space of the school.

Education and Rurality

Research has explored how aspects of rurality affect educational experiences (Balfour, 2012) such as identity (Reed-Danahay, 1996), race (Bhopal and Myers, 2011; Villenas, 2001) and gender (Collins and Coleman, 2008; Pini, 2006). Research conducted on ‘mainly White schools’ suggests that BME pupils in such environments experience racism on a daily basis (Carroll, 2002) and teachers are unwilling to recognise and act on such racist behaviour (Cline *et al*, 2002).

Whilst there has been little research that has explored the experiences of BME mothers in rural areas, there is a body of work which has examined the role that BME parents play in their children’s education. Such work has focussed on how BME families draw on their middle class identity as a resource to emphasise the importance of education for their children (Archer, 2010); the intersection of class privilege and racial subordination (Archer, 2011); and the dominance of ‘authentic’ middle class identity (Archer, 2012). Others have emphasised how parents choose secondary schools for their children, particularly in relation to discourses of ‘multiculture’ such as racialised, ethnic and religious differences (Byrne and de Tona, 2013; Lareau and Horvat, 1999) as well as the impact of class on the availability of educational ‘choice’ for BME parents (Weekes-Bernard, 2007). More recent research has explored the positioning of BME middle class parents in schools (Rollock *et al*, 2012); the interplay of ethnicity and class in school choice and friendship groups (Ball *et al*, 2013) and the role that Whiteness plays in school settings (Levine Rasky, 2009; Reay *et al*, 2007). Research has also explored how social class plays a significant role in educational achievement, particularly in relation to working class identities (Reay, 1998; 2001; 2006) and the intersection of these identities in relation to gender and race (Bhopal, 2010; Byrne, 2006; Reay *et al*, 2010; 2011; Rollock *et al*, 2012).

Chapman and Bhopal (2013) have examined how Black parents are viewed by teachers as non-participatory and uncaring regarding their children’s education. This notion of deviance directed towards Black parents is based upon White, middle class norms of behaviour and White privilege in which. ‘good parents’ are defined as White and middle class who serve the needs of the school (Siddle Walker, 2000). Contrary to popular stereotypes of BME parents being disinterested in their children’s education, BME mothers continue to play a significant role in their children’s educational progress, providing them with key advice and support in decision making processes (Khambhaita and Bhopal, 2013).

Intersectionality and ‘diaspora space’

The concept of intersectionality was first introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 who argued that at the heart of the concept is the need to discuss and explore the myriad ways in which categories such as race, gender and class intersect and interact to affect women’s lives. The interaction of these concepts and how they overlap is important to examine the different types of inequalities which exist for women. The concept was further developed by Patricia Hill Collins (1990) who included dimensions such as nation, sexuality, age and ethnicity in relation to understanding women’s experiences in society. Intersectionality provides feminists with the opportunity to examine women’s experiences through a lens which views race, class, gender, sexuality, age and other inequalities as mutually constituting processes; these categories do not exist independently from one another, but mutually reinforce each other. Gender, class and race and other points of difference cannot be seen as mutually exclusive but must be understood as interacting with each other to explore the complex and sometimes contradictory experiences of women’s lives (Bhopal, 2010; Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Nash, 2008; Phoenix, 2001). Bhopal and Preston’s (2011: 219) analysis of race and intersectionality suggests a process of ‘mashing up’ different discourses to challenge White dominant structures. Others have argued that in order to explore the concept of intersectionality, specific methodologies must be developed so that intersectional identities can be analysed (McCall, 2005). McCall (2005) suggests that the methodologies employed by those taking an intersectional approach should explore ‘the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations’ (2005: 1774).

Avtar Brah (1996) in her analyses of diaspora borders and identity engages with the concept of intersectionality to understand how identities can be understood in changing circumstances. This article will use Brah’s analysis of diaspora space, the journey and the translation of power within journeys to examine how BME mothers are positioned as ‘outsiders’ in White rural schools. ‘Diaspora space’ is used to examine how migratory movements from one destination to another are affected by power and social and economic structures. It is defined as, ‘the intersectionality of diaspora, border and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes. It addresses the global condition of culture, economics and politics as a site of ‘migrancy’ and ‘travel’ which seriously problematises the subject position of the ‘native’ (Brah, 1996: 181). Brah suggests that, ‘diaspora space as a conceptual category is ‘inhabited’ not only by those who have migrated

and their descendants but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous' (1996: 181).

The idea of diaspora space is based on the concept of the journey. Journeys involve decisions about settling and belonging. The idea of moving from one place to another is not necessarily about who is travelling, but about *when, how and under which circumstances* individuals make such decisions about moving *from one place to another*. This movement is based upon the socioeconomic, political and cultural conditions upon which the trajectories of the journey take place. How groups become situated in new environments is based upon different economic processes, state policies and institutional practices. 'This 'situatedness' is central to how different groups come to be relationally positioned in a given context' (Brah, 1996:p182-183). Consequently, when we speak about diasporic movements, the emphasis is on exploring how relations of power work *between* different groups as well as *within* and *between* them. 'The concept of diaspora centres on *the configurations of power which differentiate diasporas internally as well as situate them in relation to one another*' (1996:183 original emphasis).

The Research: Context and Background

This article draws upon twenty in-depth interviews with mothers who identified themselves from BME backgrounds. The women were selected from three primary schools all of which were within 5 miles of each other, located in neighbouring villages. The county in which the villages are located is predominantly White and politically Conservative. Historically, the county has been one of the safest and most secure Conservative strongholds in England. The population of BME residents in the district is 6.9% compared to 11.0% in the county, 14.7% in the South East and 14.1% nationally (Census, 2011). The numbers of BME individuals in the district is low compared to national figures.

Whilst predominantly White, there is a variation in the socio-economic groups of the families who live in the three villages in which the schools are located. School A which I shall call Yew tree¹ is predominantly working class and White. It is located in the poorest of the three villages. Eight mothers participated from this school, two are from mixed heritage

¹ All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the schools and the respondents.

backgrounds (White/Black), three are Black British and three are British Indian. School B which I shall call Ashurst attracts a diverse range of families from both working and middle class backgrounds. It is considered one of the most successful schools in the area and was recently awarded an ‘outstanding’ grade from OFSTED². However, the report emphasises that the school should, ‘increase pupils’ knowledge and understanding of the cultures, lifestyles and beliefs found in the United Kingdom’. Five of the mothers from this school participated in the research. Two are Black British, one is African, one is Bangladeshi (born in Bangladesh and whose family ran the local Indian take away) and one is British Indian.

School C which I shall call Beech End also attracts a mixture of children from working and middle class backgrounds. It has a higher number of children identified as having special educational needs compared to those in Yew Tree and Ashurst. It was recently graded as ‘good’ by OFSTED. Seven of the mothers were interviewed from this school. Three are of Indian origin and four are Black British. The majority of respondents in the study defined themselves as middle class, with two who defined themselves as working class. These definitions were based upon their employment and income levels. Those who defined themselves as middle class are from families where either they or their partners are employed in professional occupations such as doctors, nurses, teachers and solicitors and those who defined themselves from working class backgrounds are shop keepers or work in takeaways or supermarkets.

The majority of pupils who attend the schools are from White British backgrounds, with only a small minority representing a range of other minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average. All three schools are predominantly White in terms of student and staff intake.

Access to the schools was obtained via the head teachers and the county council. As I had previously conducted research in the county, the schools were willing to participate in the research. Schools were selected based on whether they were defined as ‘mainly White

² OFSTED is the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills in England. OFSTED is an independent body which reports directly to Parliament. The main role of OFSTED is to inspect and regulate services which care for children and young people, and those providing education and skills for learners of all ages (see <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/about-us>).

schools', with a total population of 4-6% of BME pupils (Cline *et al*, 2002; DfES, 2004). The head teachers were informed that the focus of the research was to explore the experiences of BME parents in predominantly White schools. Parents were also told about the aims of the research and all agreed to be interviewed. All of the parents were keen to share their experiences, particularly the reasons why they had initially moved to the countryside. They were specifically asked about their relationships with teachers, other parents and their views on their experiences of sending their children to a predominantly White school in a rural location. Ethical clearance for the research was obtained from the University Ethics committee in line with the British Educational Research Association's guidelines. As a non-White Asian female conducting the research, my own positionality affected the research. Many of the respondents expressed a shared empathy with me, particularly when I revealed my own experiences of sending my children to a predominantly White school in a rural location. Respondents revealed a shared empathy based upon a shared identity of the 'other' in an alien environment.³ The county and schools were assured of anonymity and confidentiality and each participant was given a consent form which they signed. All of the interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed. Participants agreed that they did not want anyone other than the researcher to read the transcripts and all were happy for their interviews to be used in the dissemination process. All participants were offered the opportunity to read the transcripts and to make any changes to their interviews, however only two respondents decided to see their transcripts and were happy with the content.

The rural idyll?

The majority of respondents who participated in the study said that they had moved to the countryside for employment and/or for a 'better life'. Many spoke about their feelings of schools in cities becoming overcrowded, as well as the hostility and racism they experienced in the city. Kamaljit and her husband have three children, two of whom attend Beech End primary school and whilst their work brought them to the countryside, this was also a conscious decision and one that they had thought of many times in the past. Kamaljit defined herself as middle class.

³ For a further discussion of positionality see Bhopal and Myers (2011).

We had decided a long time ago that we wanted to move out of the city because we were not happy there. We had some problems with our neighbours and one of my friends she moved out to a small village and it all sounded so nice. We have been here for about five years now and people still won't speak to me or look at me. I was expecting it to be open and friendly, but it is the opposite. It is a better life because it is quieter and the schools are good, but you have to pay a price for that. I don't feel that I belong here and the people in the village and in the school don't want to make me feel that I belong, because to them I don't belong here.

Juliette who is Black, middle class and originally from Jamaica also spoke about her non-acceptance.

It is funny when they see you coming they all look and stare at you like you're not a human being and I used to get that in school and they have certain stereotypes of you. They immediately think that you are not educated and don't know how to cope when you speak to them and show them that actually you are an educated person and you are a professional. It challenges their stereotypes.

Juliette mentioned the different reactions she received from her neighbours and those in the school. On the one hand many were openly friendly, yet on the other hand she experienced overt hostility.

The countryside is a strange place on the one hand people are friendly they say hello to you, but this is in a fickle and shallow way and on the other hand they will be overtly offensive to you like saying you have stringy hair and your skin doesn't burn in the sun because it is Black. I find that a challenge and I find it confusing. It could just be ignorance or it could be a form of racism that is made to put you in your place to let you know that you will never be accepted as one of us because you are a Black person and the countryside is not a place that is for you.

All of the respondents reported that they felt the countryside was fraught with overt racism and suspicion and the preserve of the White community (not necessarily middle class). Many respondents felt that by virtue of their identity (not being White) they were regarded and treated as temporary trespassers (who would go back to where they came from). They were in a place and environment that was not theirs to claim by virtue of their Black identity. Jyoti who is British Indian and worked as a nurse at the local hospital described her experience.

I remember once and it was very upsetting. There was a family who came to the hospital and the son had an injury. They were quite loud and I think the father had been drinking and he started to shout and I think I heard him use the word Paki⁴ to his wife, he whispered it but I heard him. I found that upsetting because I was just doing my job, trying to help them.

Before moving to the countryside all of the respondents expected the quality of their lives to improve and they did not expect to experience racism. Many said they were naive in their outlook and had images of the countryside as a rural and perfect idyll in which they would be welcomed and accepted as members of their community. Whilst all of the respondents said they were pleased with their children's education, this was far from perfect and the majority felt that they had to prove themselves to their community and to the teachers. Brah (1996) has argued that changes in population movements, 'are creating new displacements, new diasporas' (1996: 179). Consequently, these changes can be described in relation to, '...a proliferation of new border crossings the language of 'borders' and of 'diaspora' [which] acquires a new currency'. When BME communities move into the White rural space of the countryside, they are crossing borders which are the preserve of White community members. Consequently crossing borders invokes the changing and shifting of identities and diasporas in which the 'other' enters and occupies a predominantly White space.

Mothers' attitudes to their children's education

All of the mothers were very positive about their children's education and wanted them to do well and some were keen for their children to take entrance tests for private schools. All took an active role in the education of their children, none of them said they had missed any events such as school assemblies, school performances or parent's evenings and all were keen that their children were accepted in the schools. Kerry who is middle class and from a Black African background was disappointed with how Beech End had dealt with her son when she questioned teachers when her son was put in the lowest set for his maths class. Kerry however was adamant that her son should have been in the top maths set as he participated in extra curricula maths activities outside of school. Kerry felt that her treatment was an indication of her status as a Black mother who was perceived as non-educated and aggressive by the teachers.

⁴ 'Paki' is a racist derogatory term used in England and is often directed at those from the Indian sub-continent.

When John was put in a lower stream for his maths I knew that something was wrong and I knew that he was much better than they thought he was. I went and spoke to the teacher and he was very defensive. I don't think he liked to be challenged and I told him that he had made a mistake. He wasn't very friendly and the next thing I had to see the head teacher because I didn't feel as though I was being listened to. I was made to feel that I was doing something wrong by making a point to the teacher and he made me feel as though I was complaining rather than being concerned for wanting the best for my son. But I am concerned about my child's education and so should be able to communicate that to the school. It is not the same as what I see when the White mothers complain, they are treated differently to me. I can definitely say that there are differences in the way in which I am treated compared to them. The White mothers are listened to, they are not judged and their views are taken on board. It is something that you can't identify, but there is something there that makes me feel as though I am not entitled to question the teachers because I am Black, but the White mothers are. It is their right and not mine, because I am not *allowed* to [original emphasis].

Kali who is middle class and British Indian also echoed this sentiment. When her son had experienced racist name calling, Kali felt that she was treated as the villain rather than the victim.

I remember there was this one boy who was a bit aggressive and he would push Jamil physically and Jamil is a little boy and this went on for a while and I went to the school and was told by the teacher that I was over reacting and it was just a game and boys were playing. I became concerned and went to the school again and for the second time I was treated like I was causing trouble and I also felt that I was not being listened to. I was seen as being the problem.

Kali went to see the head teacher and it was only when the child began using racist language towards Jamil that the teachers intervened and Kali felt this was because the teachers were afraid that she may have made an official complaint to the county.

I sort of indicated to the teachers that I wasn't happy with what they were doing and if they did not deal with it, I would speak to the governors and then the education department. Also when the racial element came into it, they felt they had no choice but to deal with it. I think the school may have had a bad experience in the past about

racism, I have heard that and I think they didn't want to be known to be racist or unsympathetic. But they should have dealt with my issues at the beginning and I should not have had to wait for the incident to get serious before the school acted on it. I see other parents going to the school and making small complaints and they are acted upon immediately. The White mothers are not seen as being the trouble makers, they are treated sympathetically and their needs are addressed rather than questioned.

Fumi who is middle class and from a mixed heritage background also commented on how she was treated compared to the White parents.

I have noticed with some of the teachers the way they look at me. I think they make certain assumptions about me because of my hair (dreadlocks) and also because of the way I dress. They assume that I am not educated and that I will not be able to engage in a conversation with them and so they sort of look down at me. But I make sure that I am always professional and do not come across as aggressive or any other way. But I do think that they treat the other mothers differently, particularly the White mothers. They show them respect, they listen to them and they take on board what they are saying.

Many of the respondents spoke about how they were positioned as 'outsiders' in the White space of the school. In these predominantly White locations, White norms of behaviour were taken for granted as particular ways of *knowing* and *being*. Because Black mothers did not fit into this stereotype of a 'twinset and pearls'⁵ appearance they were misunderstood and positioned as 'other'. As there were few visible minorities in the school, the playground and the surrounding area there was a misplacement of Black mothers. Teachers and others did not know how to place them because they disrupted 'normality' in the rural; consequently the behaviour of Black mothers was seen as deviant and nonconformist as they were judged against White, middle class stereotypes of motherhood and parenting. Black mothers were judged first by their racial identity and second by their class. Many (if not all) of the Black women's parenting styles were based on strict rules and a strong emphasis on education in which children were expected to work hard and succeed. Yet such values were misplaced within the White space of the school. Many respondents reported that when such values were expressed by White, middle class mothers they were celebrated and judged positively and

⁵ Twinset and pearls is a stereotype associated most closely with women's wardrobes during the 1950s and 1960s, they are often seen as a traditional form of dress for (White) women. The attire is often associated with the Women's Institute which is a British community based organisation usually found in countryside villages.

interpreted as mothers wanting the best for their children. Black mothers were seen as too ambitious, having expectations for their children that were beyond their capabilities.

Many of the respondents indicated that teachers did not hide the way they treated certain parents, explaining that gender, class and ethnicity were powerful factors in how they were positioned and treated. Several of the mothers were in mixed race relationships. Jatinder who is middle class and married to a White British man said that initially when her children started attending the school, she did not feel listened to by the teachers. However when the teachers met Julian her partner, who is White British, this changed.

At the first parents evening we went to, I think the teachers did not realise that Julian was White and I felt as though they started to treat me differently and they also knew that he was a professional and it made a difference to how they treated me. I see that happens a lot in the school. Parents are judged in all sorts of ways, mainly by their class and for us it's our race. I can see it, there is one family that perhaps is not that conformist and I hear the other mothers saying they are 'chavs'⁶ and they don't want their children to play with them. It's not very nice, the family are judged in negative terms because they are poor and working class.

Many of the mothers spoke about how their race positioned them first and foremost and consequently their voice was given less power and value compared to the White parents. Teachers made a judgement about mothers based on the view that White superiority in a predominantly White space was taken as the norm. Behaviour that did not fit this stereotype fell outside of the confines of what was considered *acceptable* and *non-acceptable* behaviour as defined by the White community. Suria who is middle class and from a Pakistani background emphasised that she was made to feel that she was *not* entitled to the same privileges as White parents.

In the countryside, and in White schools in the countryside, the teachers and the parents make you feel as though you should be grateful that you are here *at their school* and that it isn't really something that you should be entitled to because you are not one of them, you are in fact an outsider. I am not sure what you have to do to become an insider; I guess you have to be born here. But it is made clear to you that

⁶ 'Chav' is a derogatory term used in England to describe those from White working class backgrounds; it is often associated with the wearing of branded clothing and ostentatious jewellery. The term has Anglo Romany origins in the word Chavi meaning child (Bhopal and Myers, 2008).

you are *not* an insider from the very beginning; when those in the countryside meet you, they just let you know – one way or the other! [original emphasis]

Many of the respondents spoke about how they felt their views were judged negatively compared to those of the White, middle class mothers. This ‘White, middle class sense of entitlement’ which I have discussed elsewhere (Bhopal, 2013) refers to White mothers feeling they were entitled to and had the right to make requests to teachers that were important for *their* children’s education, compared to those request made by BME mothers, and as a result teachers had to listen to them and act on their requests. When Aisha a Black middle class, African mother asked the teacher whether it was possible for her son to have extra work to prepare him for an entrance exam for private school, the response she received was negative.

I felt as though she [teacher] did not want to help me at all, almost saying how dare I ask her for this? It made me feel as though I should not be asking and should not be entitled to be asking for this, because I am not one of them [a White mother]? Yet I know that when one of the White mothers asked for something similar she was dealt with immediately and given what she wanted. That upset me and made me think how much we as Black people have to struggle to be accepted somewhere like here.

Research suggests that parent’s relationships with schools are affected by an intersection of identities of class, race and gender (Archer, 2011; Byrne, 2006; Reay, 1998; Vincent, 2000). Within this context Black mothers continued to be positioned as ‘outsiders’ (despite their middle class status).

Visible or invisible identities?

Whilst many of the BME mothers spoke about how their presence caused general discomfort at the schools, there was also a sense of being invisible in the White space of the school. Jamila who is working class and whose husband owned the local Indian take away spoke about this most clearly. She always dressed in traditional Asian dress (shalwar kameez)⁷ and wore a headscarf as she is a Muslim but she often felt she was ignored at the school. She rarely spoke to other parents and stood alone during school pick up times.

⁷ Salwar Kameez is a traditional form of clothing worn by those from the Indian sub-continent. It consists of a tunic and baggy trousers.

There are times when I feel particularly visible because I look so different here compared to all the other mothers. This is the countryside so we [Black and Asian people] stand out anyway. There are not many of us here and so when we are here we stand out. I have seen the way they [White people] look at me because I wear traditional Asian dress and I wear a headscarf. They used to whisper about me when I first came here. But on the other hand I am also seen as being invisible, they walk past me and ignore me and quite often when I am in queues here in shops and at the station [White] people always push in front of me as though I am invisible.

Jamila was positioned as an ‘outsider’, she is working class, non-White and her ‘presentation of self’ disrupted White norms of acceptability. She occupied a position of heightened visibility at the same as occupying a position of invisibility. Andrea a working class Black British woman also spoke about her visible and invisible presence. .

As a Black woman I think I stand out because I am Black and I am a large woman so you would notice me wouldn’t you? Well out here [in the countryside] it depends when [White] people want to notice you they do. When I have been to the school to complain they have tried to in some respects ignore me and make me feel that what I am saying is not important. When I have been out with my family we have been invisible, we are ignored and we have had incidents where people have pushed past me and ignored us in shops and cafes. If it is convenient for [White] people they will chose to make you visible or make you invisible.

Many of the respondents spoke about their treatment in the rural space as one of exclusion (overt and covert) in relation to their treatment in public spaces. Some respondents compared this to the inclusive behaviour they had experienced in the city. Kulwinder a middle class British Asian mother said,

The way I am treated here is very alien to me. I have only lived in cities and cannot imagine ever being ignored in a shop because I am Black or because you think I don’t belong here [in the countryside]. It is quite strange how the racism we have experienced is explicitly overt, yet it is completely accepted and [White] people think they can treat you that way because this is a rural village and we were not born here. So we don’t belong here and when they can, they will constantly remind you of this.

Visibility and invisibility was related to being accepted as an insider as a legitimate member of the community because, '... 'minorities' are positioned in relation not only to 'majorities' but also with respect to one another and vice versa. Moreover, individual subjects may occupy 'minority' and 'majority' positions simultaneously, and this has important implications for the formation of subjectivity' (Brah, 1996: 189). Whilst the majority of mothers defined themselves as middle class, their class positioning did not necessarily ensure them a privileged position in the White rural space of the school. It was their physical identity of being non-White which emphasised their position as 'outsiders'. Their racial background of being Black seemed to override their middle class identity. Crozier's (2005) research has also suggested that BME parents report negative school experiences in which their children's abilities are underestimated compared to their White counterparts. Indeed, as Archer argues, '...the deployment of similar resources and strategies among middle-class families may be read and received very differently according to the identities and structural location of the actors in question' (2010: 19). Rollock *et al* also suggest that race overrides class, '...it is evident that racism persists as part of British society albeit often in subtle, everyday forms and that even middle class blacks remain judged based on the colour of their skin'. However, at the same time, the Black middle classes have, '...at their disposal relative power and privilege to help them mediate racial injustice in a way that, on account of differences in access to and deployment of cultural capital, is not available to their black working class counterparts' (2011: 1091). Whiteness is a source of cultural capital which is not available to Black people, consequently, interactions are race-specific, but class impacts on this because, '...middle-class black parents have access to important forms of cultural capital, just as middle-class white parents do' (Lareau and Horvat, 1999: 42).

Aspects of belonging: Home or away?

Many of the mothers spoke about their reasons for leaving the city to move into the countryside. The majority had moved for jobs, others because they wanted to bring their children up 'in a safe and secure environment'. When asked about whether they felt they wanted to stay in the countryside on a long term basis, many were ambivalent. Geeta a middle class Asian respondent said,

I am not sure I will stay here [in the countryside] for the long term. Once the children have left home to go to university, it may well be that we move back into the city. But

it depends on jobs as well. If we keep our jobs here, we could still move out to the city and work here. We would not have to worry about the children if they have left home.

Jacky a middle class Black British respondent said,

For me, it is the question of acceptance and what that means. Is this my home? I am not so sure? It is my home because I live here and have done so for many years now, but it doesn't *feel* like home. I still don't feel as though I am part of the community and I don't think that I am accepted as being part of that community. I am Black so I am always an outsider. The countryside is not for Black people, it's almost as though they [White people] make us feel it's not *our* place, but theirs. We are not considered natives to the countryside [original emphasis].

Jacky's use of the word native refers to *not belonging* to the rural space, but being outside of it, even though she has for many years been a member of the community in which she resides. The native is the 'other', always an 'outsider' and always excluded. Black people do not have the privileged space of legitimate claims of belonging to the rural because it is not historically their place; it is not their 'home'. As Brah states, 'It is quite possible to feel at home in a place and yet, the experience of social exclusions may inhibit public proclamations of the place as home' (1996: 193). Shereen a middle class Black British mother said,

I do feel this is my home and I do feel at home, but when I go out and I see sometimes the ways in which I am treated that can quickly change. So it varies because I feel at home, whilst not at home at the same time. I am not sure where home is, is it here as I have been living here for a long time or is it the city or is it back home in Jamaica. That is an interesting question for me, where is home? And will we ever been seen as it being our home by White people who feel it is *theirs* to claim and not ours? That is a troubling question for me [original emphasis].

Brah (1996: 194) suggests that, 'home is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination'. It is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory, which is seen as the place of 'origin'. Some respondents expressed home as the lived experience of a locality. However, the lack of acceptance from neighbours, teachers and other parents reflected their feelings of *not* being 'at home' or part of the local community. As Shereen said,

I think I would feel more at home if I felt accepted by the people who live here. I would then feel that I belonged here, but at the moment I don't get that distinct feeling that I belong here and we have been living here for nearly ten years now. I don't know if other [White] people have that same sense of feeling that I have, I think it could be because I am not White so won't be seen as someone who is able to or even allowed to belong here. Perhaps there is an attitude that they [White people] think that we will go back to the city, back to where we came from. I have heard some people say those kinds of things.

Brah's concept of border is a useful concept to analyse how the process of acceptance works for 'outsiders'. 'Borders: arbitrary dividing lines that are simultaneously social, cultural and psychic; territories to be patrolled against those whom they construct as 'outsiders'... where fear of the Other is fear of the self; places where claims to ownership – claims to 'mine', 'yours' and 'theirs' – are staked out, contested, defended and fought over' (1996: 198).

Conclusions

This article has demonstrated the processes by which BME mothers are positioned as 'outsiders' in the White rural space of the school. Due to White middle class norms of 'good parenting' the efforts of BME mothers as being fully engaged in their children's education were often undervalued and unrecognised by teachers. BME mothers in White rural spaces were misplaced as they disrupted traditional middle class norms of being. It is precisely the predominance of Whiteness in the rural that contributes to the 'outsider' position of BME mothers. Whilst intersectionality clearly plays a key part in how women are positioned, it is their racial identity that acts to mediate class in which BME mothers are *misplaced* in the White space of the school. Women's class identity affected how they negotiated their relationships in schools, but it was their race that positioned them as 'outsiders'. Lareau and Horvat argue that being White in the school context is seen, '...as a cultural resource that white parents unwittingly draw on in their school negotiations in this context. Technically speaking, in this field, being white becomes a type of cultural capital' (1999:7) which is a resource that BME mothers do not have access to. Many of the mothers emphasised the performance of their middle class values and attitudes knowing that because of their racial identity they would be positioned as 'other'. Their performance of *being* middle class (for example knowing the educational targets that their children should be meeting at certain

levels and ages) was used to enhance their cultural and social resources in their relationships in the White rural space of the school. Consequently, BME middle class mothers approached the school with greater resources compared to BME working class mothers and used this to their advantage. In this process race is understood as, ‘...a product of perceptual practices’ (Byrne, 2006: 74). Reay (1998) has also emphasised the intersection of race and class in which middle class mothers draw upon their material resources in the generation of social and cultural capital to invest in their children’s education. Experiences in the rural vary by gender, class and race. The use of intersectionality to analyse the position of BME mothers in White rural spaces suggests that a focus on class analysis may disregard intra-class differences and individual experiences in the rural (Bryant and Pini, 2011). Nash (2008) outlines how the concept of intersectionality remains complex, contradictory and sometimes confusing due to; vague definitions of the concept, a lack of clear methodology to analyse the concept, empirical validity and the use of Black women as intersectional subjects in its analysis. However, this article suggests that intersections between gender and class are intricate, yet significant, but cannot be understood in isolation from each other or from race. An analysis of how gender, class and race intersect and affect how BME mothers are positioned in White rural schools enables a greater understanding of how rural communities treat ‘others’ and position them as ‘outsiders’. As BME individuals decide to live in the countryside, they cross borders, at the same time as they move across different geographical, cultural and psychic boundaries which separate them as ‘outsiders’. Whilst they want acceptance in this ‘imagined community’ (Andersen, 1993), they also want to maintain their own sense of identity in the White rural space of the countryside, yet intersectionality - aspects of class, racism, gender, sexuality and other axes of differentiation - will continue to, ‘articulate and disarticulate in the diaspora space’ (Brah, 1996: 209). The White rural idyll, ‘... obscures the part played by racialised minorities in the construction of the countryside and denies their experiences’ (Holloway, 2007: 17). Furthermore, there is a ‘need to understand romantic representations of rurality but also see beyond them by combining an awareness of the history of racially-exclusive constructions of the rural with an analysis of the ways these are employed by different actors in a specific socio-spatial context’ (2007:20). It is only then can we understand diversity in rural contexts in which BME communities are accepted as members who are *allowed* to participate fully without being excluded, marginalised or ‘othered’.

References

- Archer, L (2010) 'We raised it with the head': the educational practices of minority middle class families. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 31, 4: 449-469.
- Archer, L (2011) 'Constructing minority middle class ethnic identity: an exploratory study with parents, pupils and young professionals'. *Sociology* 45, 1; 134-151.
- Archer, L (2012) 'Between authenticity and pretension': parents', pupils' and young professionals' negotiations of minority ethnic middle-class identity'. *Sociological Review* 60, 1: 129-148.
- Andersen, B (1993) *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Askins, K (2009) 'Crossing divides: ethnicity and rurality', *Journal of Rural Studies* special issue 'Whose rural? Beyond white/Anglo rurality', 25(4): 365-375
- Balfour, R (2012) Rurality Research and Rural Education: Exploratory and Explanatory Power. *Perspectives in Education*. 30:9-18.
- Ball, S et al (2013) 'Social mix, schooling and intersectionality: identity and risk for Black middle class families'. *Research Papers in Education*, 28, 3: 265-258.
- Bell, D and Jayne, M (2010) The creative countryside: Policy and practice in the UK rural cultural economy, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 26, pp.209-218.
- Bhopal, K (2010) *Asian Women in Higher Education: Shared communities*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham.
- Bhopal, K (2013) 'Notions of White privilege and identity: class, race and gender in the playground', Paper presented to BERA Conference, University of Sussex.
- Bhopal, K and Myers, M (2008) *Insiders, Outsiders and Others: Gypsies and Identity*. Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press.
- Bhopal, K and Myers, M (2011) *Rural Racism in Primary schools in England*. Paper Presented to BERA Annual Conference.
- Bhopal, K and Preston, J (2011) *Intersectionality and race in Education*. London: Routledge.
- Brah, A (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora*. London: Sage.
- Brah, A. and Phoenix, A. (2004) Ain't I a Woman? Revisiting intersectionality. *Journal of International Women's Studies* 5, 3:75-86.
- Bryant, L and Pini, B (2011). *Gender and Rurality*. London: Routledge.
- Burnett, J (2011) *Geographies of Racism*. London: Institute of Race Relations.

Byrne, B (2006) *White Lives: the interplay of 'race', class and gender in everyday life*. London: Routledge.

Byrne, B and de Tona, C (2013) 'Multicultural desires? Parental negotiation of multicultural and difference in choosing secondary schools for their children'. *Sociological Review* DOI: 10.1111/1467-954X.12076

Carroll, P (2002) 'A Festival of Fools: tackling racism in schools without a script', *Race Equality Teaching*, 22, 2.

Chakraborti, N and Garland, J (2004) 'England's Green and Pleasant Land? Examining Racist Prejudice in a Rural Context', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 38 (4): 383-398.

Chapman, T and Bhopal, K (2013) 'Countering common sense understandings of 'good parenting:' women of colour advocating policy change for their children'. In special issue: Honouring Derrick Bell's Contributions to Teacher Education, Race, Poverty and Leadership. *Race Ethnicity and Education*.

Cline, T. with Guida, A., Fihosy, C., Gray, H., Lambert, H. and Neale, J. (2002) *Minority ethnic pupils in mainly white schools: research report RR 365*. London: Department for Education and Skills.

Collins, D and Coleman, T (2008) Social Geographies of Education: Looking Within, and Beyond, School Boundaries. *Geography Compass*. 2: 281-299.

Crenshaw, K. (1989) Demarginalising the intersection of race and sex. University of Chicago *Legal Forum* 139, 139-167.

Crozier, G (2005) 'There's a War Against Our children': black parents' views on their children's education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*. 26:5, 585-598

Donnor, J. (2006). Parents: The biggest influence in the education of African American football student-athletes. Dixon, A and Rousseau, C. (Eds). *Critical Race Theory in Education: All God's Children Got a Song*. New York: Routledge, pp. 153-166.

Dunne, M (ed) (2008) *Gender, Sexuality, and Development: Education and Society in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Fields-Smith, C. (2005). African American parents before and after Brown. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 20, 2, 129-135.

Garland, J. and Chakraborti, N. (2006) 'Race', Space and Place: Examining Identity and Cultures of Exclusion in Rural England', *Ethnicities*, 6, 2: 159-177.

- Geller, P and Stockett, M (2006) *Feminist Anthropology: Past, Present and Future*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Hill Collins, P (1990) *Black Feminist Thought*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- Holloway, S, Hubbard, P, Jons, H and Pimlott-Wilson, H (2010) Geographies of Education and the Significance of Children, Youth and Families. *Progress in Human Geography*. 34: 583-600.
- Independent, 'Downside of rural life: poverty, racism and mental illness'
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/downside-of-rural-life-poverty-racism-and-mental-illness-440920.html>).
- Khambhatia, P and Bhopal, K (2013) 'Home or away: Home or away? The Significance of ethnicity, class and attainment in the housing choices of female university students. *Race Ethnicity and Education*.
- Lareau, A and Horvat, E (1999) 'Moments of social inclusion and exclusion: race, class and cultural capital in family-school relationships'. *Sociology of Education*, 72,1: 37-52.
- Levine-Rasky, C (2009) 'Dynamics of parental involvement in a multicultural school' *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 30, 3: 331-344.
- McCall, L. (2005). The Complexity of intersectionality. *Signs* 30, 1771-1800.
- Moletsane, R (2012) Repositioning Educational Research on Rurality and Rural Education in South Africa: Beyond Deficit Paradigms. *Perspectives in Education*. 30: 1-8.
- Nash, J (2008) 'Rethinking intersectionality' *Feminist Review* 89: 1-15.
- Neal, S. (2002) 'Rural landscapes, representations and racism: examining multicultural citizenship and policy-making in the English countryside', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 25, No.3: 442-461.
- Neal, S (2009) *Rural Identities: Ethnicity and Community in the English Countryside*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Panelli, R and Little, J (2003). Gender Research in Rural Geography. *Gender, Place and Culture*. 10: 281-289.
- Phoenix, Ann (2001). Practising feminist research: The intersection of gender and 'race' in the research process. Kum Kum Bhavnani (Ed.). *Feminism and Race*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 203–219.
- Pini, B (2006) A Critique of 'New' Rural Local Governance: The Case of Gender in a Rural Australian Setting. *Journal of Rural Studies*. 22: 396-408.

Qiang, D, Xiaoyun, L, Hongping, Y and Hang, K (2008) Gender Inequality in Rural Education and Poverty. *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*. 40: 64-78.

Reay, D (1998) *Class Work: Mothers' involvement in children's schooling*. London: University College Press.

Reay, D (2001) Finding or losing yourself? Working class relationships to education *Journal of Education Policy* 16, 4, 333-346.

Reay, D (2006) [The Zombie Stalking English Schools: Social Class and Educational Inequality](#) *British Journal of Educational Studies* 54, 3, 288-307.

Reay, D et al (2007) ['A Darker Shade of Pale?' Whiteness, the Middle Classes and Multi-Ethnic Inner City Schooling](#) *Sociology* 41, 6: 1041-1060.

Reay, D et al (2010) ["Fitting in" or "standing out": working-class students in UK higher education](#) *British Educational Research Journal* 32, 1: 1-19.

Reay, D et al (2011) [White Middle Class Identities and Urban Schooling](#). London: Palgrave Press.

Reed-Danahay, D (1996) *Education and Identity in Rural France: The Politics of Schooling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rollock, N et al (2011) 'The Public Identities of the Black middle classes: managing race in public spaces'. *Sociology*, 45, 6: 1078-1093.

Rollock, N et al (2012) 'Middle class by profession': Class status and identification amongst the Black middle classes, *Ethnicities*, 13, 3: 253 – 275.

Rowley, S. J., Helaine, L. J., & Banerjee, M. (2010). Reflecting on racism: School involvement and perceived teacher discrimination in African American mothers. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 3, 1, 83-92.

Siddle Walker, V. (2000). Valued segregated schools for African American children in the South, 1935-1969: A Review of common themes and characteristics. *Review of Educational Research*, 70, 3, 253.

South West Rural Racism Project (2009) Plymouth: Institute of Race Relations.

Thomas, J and Harden, H (2007) *Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews*. ESRC/NCRM seminar paper, Institute of Education University of London.

Villenas, S (2001) 'Latina Mothers and Small-Town Racisms: Creating Narratives of Dignity and Moral Education in North Carolina'. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*. 32: 3-28.

Vincent, C (2000) *Including Parents? Education, Citizenship and Parental Agency*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Woods, M (2009) Rural Geography: Blurring boundaries and making connections, *Progress in Human Geography*, 33, 6: 849-858.

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8, 1, 69-92.